

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-08 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AID-05 EB-07 CIEP-01 STR-04 OMB-01 CEA-01

COME-00 FRB-03 XMB-02 OPIC-03 LAB-04 SIL-01 OES-06

TRSY-02 FPC-01 IO-13 /131 W

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R 011500Z DEC 76

FM AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5527

INFO AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

CINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ALGIERS 2819

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, AG

SUBJECT: US-ALGERIAN RELATIONS: DISCUSSION WITH BENHABYLES

1. SUMMARY: SECRETARY GENERAL OF FOREIGN MINISTRY SEES ENCOURAGING POSSIBILITIES FOR LONGTERM ECONOMIC COLLABORATION BETWEEN US AND ALGERIA, BUT DWELLS AT LENGTH ON SAHARA AS PRINCIPAL ISSUE BETWEEN US. END SUMMARY.

2. CALLED ON SECRETARY GENERAL OF FOREIGN MINISTRY ABDELMALEK BENHABYLES AFTERNOON NOVEMBER 30 FOR TOUR D'HORIZON SIMILIAR TO THAT I HAD WITH DEPUTY SECRETARY GENERAL OF PRESIDENCY SMAIL HAMDANI MORNING OF SAME DAY (ALGIERS 2818).

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3. I ASKED HIM HOW HE SAW OUR RELATIONS TODAY. BENHABYLES

RESPONDED IN HIS USUAL PHILOSOPHICAL VEIN TO EFFECT THAT OUR DIFFERENCES WERE MORE IDEOLOGICAL THAN SUBSTANTIVE. ALGERIANS TOOK POSITIONS ON INTERNATIONAL PROBLEMS ACCORDING TO DICTATES THEIR INDEPENDENT, REVOLUTIONARY APPROACH. SOVIETS WERE UPSET WITH THEM AS OFTEN AS WE WERE. IN BILATERAL RELATIONS, ECONOMIC COOPERATION WAS PROPSEING BUT ITS FUTURE DEVELOPMENT UP TO US. IF WE DECIDED TO MOVE AHEAD (WITH FPC APPROVAL OF GAS CONTRACTS AND EXIM FINANCING) SUBSTANTIAL LONG-TERM COOPERATION WOULD ENSUE. IT WOULD HAVE IMPORTANT CONSEQUENCES FOR BOTH OF US BECAUSE THE COOPERATION INVOLVED WOULD NECESSARILY STRENGTHEN LINKS BETWEEN US. ALGERIA WAS AT PEACE WITH ITSELF AND DEVOTED TO RESOLVING ITS OWN PROBLEMS. IT WAS A STABLE COUNTRY, HOSTILE PROPAGANDA TO THE CONTRARY NOTWITHSTANDING, AND WE WOULD FIND IT A STEADY AND VALUABLE PARTNER.

4. IN POLITICAL FIELD, HE SAW NO IMPORTANT PROBLEMS BETWEEN US EXCEPT SAHARA, WHICH DIRECTLY AFFECTED ALGERIAN SECURITY AND NATIONAL INTEREST. I ASKED HOW ALGERIANS VIEWED OUTLOOK FOR SAUDI MEDIATION EFFORT. HE SAID IT WAS PREMATURE TO TALK OF MEDIATION. THEY WERE AT STAGE OF PROSPECTING TO SEE WHETHER THERE WAS ENOUGH COMMON GROUND FOR MEDIATION. HE WOULD NOT PREDICT OUTCOME, BUT SAID THERE NO OBJECTIVE REASON WHY A SOLUTION COULD NOT BE FOUND. ALGERIANS WERE SINCERELY INTERESTED IN PEACE IN THE AREA AND HAD MADE IT CLEAR THAT THEY HAD NO PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS AS TO HOW TO EXERCISE IN SELF-DETERMINATION SHOULD COME OUT. THE PROBLEM WAS COMPLICATED BY THE FACT THAT THE MOROCCAN APPROACH WAS MORE CANONICAL THAN NATURAL, AND REVOLVED AROUND CONSIDERATIONS OF PERSONAL ALLEGIANCE TO THE KING IN HIS COMMANDER OF THE FAITHFUL ROLE.

5. HE THEN GAVE EXTENSIVE HISTORICAL REVIEW OF PROBLEM, WHICH I REPEAT HERE IN SOME DETAIL AS A CURRENT STATEMENT OF THE ALGERIAN VIEW. HE BEGAN BY SAYING THAT, GIVEN THEIR INABILITY TO RESOLVE THEIR CONFLICTING CLAIMS TO THE SAHARA BILATERALLY, MAURITANIA AND MOROCCO HAD AGREED TO A TRIPARTITE APPROACH INVOLVING ALGERIA AS WELL. ALL THREE HAD AGREED, AND HAD SAID SO PUBLICLY, THAT ONLY WAY OUT OF PROBLEM WAS THROUGH AN EXERCISE IN SELF-DETERMINATION. THIS WAS A PROBLEM OF CONFIDENTIAL

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DECOLONIZATION PURE AND SIMPLE AND SHOULD HAVE BEEN SOLVED IN ACCORDANCE WITH USUAL PROCEDURES (HE GAVE NO EXAMPLES). WHAT HAD HAPPENED, HOWEVER, WAS THAT HASSAN AND MAURITANIANS HAD TAKEN LAW INTO THEIR OWN HANDS AND, IN CONNIVANCE WITH SPANIARDS, SEIZED TERRITORY IN QUESTION. THEY HAD THUS PRESENTED ALGERIANS WITH A FAIT ACCOMPLI AND EXPECTED THEM TO ACCEPT IT. THIS THEY COULD NOT DO FOR IDEOLOGICAL REASONS AND FOR REASONS OF NATIONAL INTEREST.

MOROCCANS HAD PROFITED BY SPANISH DISARRAY AND WEAKNESS AS FRANCO LAY DYING. SPANISH HAD EVEN GONE SO FAR AS TO REPROACH ALGERIANS FOR NOT ASSERTING THEMSELVES AND MOVING INTO TERRITORY, BUT ALGERIANS HAD NO TERRITORIAL ASPIRATIONS AND HAD NOT WANTED MILITARY SOLUTION.

6. BENHABYLES SAID THERE SEEMED TO BE NO END TO MOROCCO'S APPETITE FOR TERRITORY. MEMBERS OF THE MOROCCAN POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENT AND ISTIQLAL PARTY IN PARTICULAR WERE PUBLICLY CLAIMING TINDOUF WHEREAS OAU HAD AGREED LONG AGO THAT THE ONLY BASIS FOR STABLE BOUNDARIES IN AFRICA WAS TO FOLLOW THOSE SET DOWN BY THE COLONIAL POWER. THE MOROCCANS HAD OVER THE YEARS NEGOTIATED WITH ALGERIA A BORDER AGREEMENT BASED ON OLD FRENCH FRONTIERS RECOGNIZING ALGERIAN RIGHT TO TINDOUF. THIS HAD BEEN SOLEMNLY SIGNED BY HASSAN AND BOUMEDIENE AT RABAT IN 1972 IN FRONT OF OTHER CHIEFS OF STATE OF OAU. HASSAN HAD SINCE INVOKED THE LACK OF A PARLIAMENT AS AN EXCUSE FOR NOT RATIFYING THE AGREEMENT. IN POINT OF FACT, HOWEVER, AGREEMENT CONTAINED CLAUSE TO EFFECT THAT IF EITHER SIDE DID NOT RENOUNCE IT WITHIN THREE YEARS IT WOULD BE CONSIDERED RATIFIED. AGREEMENT WAS LEGALLY BINDING DESPITE LACK OF FORMAL RATIFICATION BY MOROCCANS.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ALGIERS 2819

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

7. ALGERIANS WERE CONCERNED NOT ONLY WITH HASSAN'S SEIZURE OF SAHARA AND DOUBTS ABOUT MOROCCAN INTENTIONS TOWARD TINDOUF BUT ALSO BY KING'S TALK OF PARIS-MADRID-RABAT AXIS. WHO NEEDED AN AXIS INVOLVING FOREIGN POWERS IN NORTH AFRICA? IT WAS TALK LIKE THIS, THE MILITARY SUPPLIES POURING IN FROM FOREIGN COUNTRIES AND MOROCCAN TROOP MOVEMENTS (NO CLUE AS TO REFERENCE HERE) THAT GAVE THE ALGERIANS CONCERN. THEY WERE INTERESTED IN PEACE AND STABILITY, NOT IN WARFARE, BUT THEY COULD NOT TOLERATE MOROCCAN ATTEMPTS TO TAKE THEIR TERRITORY.

8. WHAT ALGERIA WANTED FROM THE U.S., BENHABYLES SAID, WAS A DEMONSTRATION OF NETRALITY. THEY KNEW THAT US HAD SAID IT WAS NEUTRAL ON SUBSTANCE OF THE QUESTION, CONFIDENTIAL

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BUT THAT WAS NOT ENOUGH. OUR POSITION HAD BEEN INTERPRETED BY THE MOROCCANS AS SUPPORTING THEIRS AND THIS HAD CLEARLY STRENGTHENED THEM IN THEIR CONFRONTATION.

9. BENHABYLES SAID ALGERIANS UNDERSTOOD OUR DESIRE FOR GOOD RELATIONS WITH MOROCCO AND COULD NOT CRITICIZE US FOR THAT, BUT THEY NEEDED SOME INDICATION THAT WE ALSO VALUED GOOD RELATIONS WITH ALGERIA. BENHABYLES NOTED THAT IN POST-WAR ERA AND DURING ALGERIAN REVOLUTION UNITED STATES WAS CONSIDERED CHAMPION OF DECOLONIZATION. THE FRENCH HAD CONSIDERED WILLIAM PORTER, THEN OUR CONSUL GENERAL IN ALGIERS, A PARTISAN OF THE REVOLUTIONARIES. WE HAD BEGUN WITH A VERY GOOD REPUTATION AND GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE MERGING ALGERIAN REGIME, BUT SOMETHING HAD GONE WRONG SOMEWHERE AND WE HAD GROWN APART. WE HAD GOTTEN VERY BITTER IN OUR ATTITUDES TOWARDS EACH OTHER AND THERE HAD EVENTUALLY BEEN A BREAK IN RELATIONS. WE WERE NOW PROGRESSING TOWARDS BETTER RELATIONS, AND HAD MADE PERCEPTIBLE FORWARD MOVEMENT, BUT WE COULD DO BETTER.

10. I SAID I WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS SAHARA AND PROCESS OF DETERIORATION WITH HIM IN DETAIL SOMETIME, BUT SINCE TIME WAS RUNNING OUT ON OUR MEETING WOULD CONTENT MYSELF WITH TWO OBSERVATIONS. ONE WAS THAT SOMETHING SHOULD BE DONE ABOUT TWO PROBLEMS WHICH WERE A CONTINUING IRRITANT: PRIVATE CLAIMS AND MUSTAPHA RAIS. THE SAID

WAS THAT THE NEW ALGERIAN AMBASSADOR TO WASHINGTON WAS
NOT GOING TO HAVE AN EASY TASK. HE WOULD FIND THAT PEOPLE
ALL THOUGHT ALGERIA WAS OPPOSED TO US ON JUST ABOUT
EVERYTHING AND THAT IT WAS NON-ALIGNED IN FAVOR OF THE
SOVIETS, I.E., THAT IT WAS NOT TRULY NON-ALIGNED.
THEIR NEW MAN WOULD HAVE A TOUGH TIME EXPLAINING ALGERIA.
BENHABYLES AGREED, BUT SAID THAT WAS WHAT AMBASSADORS
WERE FOR.PARKER

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